



Wellness Connection

Still Sneezing? Find Relief from Allergies



Many times, sniffles, coughs, congestion, and watery eyes are just symptoms of a nagging cold. But if these symptoms don't ease up after a week or two, you may have allergies.

Allergies happen when the body becomes too sensitive to things such as grass, mold, smoke, pet dander, dust, and cockroaches.

MEDICINES CURB SYMPTOMS

Many helpful allergy medicines are available over the counter. Antihistamines can help relieve sneezing, runny nose, and itchiness in the nose, throat, and eyes, but some can cause drowsiness. Decongestants can help a stuffy nose. But if you choose a decongestant spray instead of a pill, stop after three days. It can make stuffiness worse. On the other hand, a nonprescription nasal spray with cromolyn sodium can prevent symptoms and is safe to take all the time.

THE BEST MOVE: PREVENTION

Avoiding allergy triggers may be the smartest move of all:

- Is dust your enemy? Use special mattress and pillow covers designed to keep out dust mites, tiny bugs that can trigger allergies. Wash bedding weekly in hot water.
- Vacuum weekly to remove dust, pet dander, and tiny bits of mold. Pick a vacuum that has a high-energy particulate absorption (HEPA) filter or double-layered bags to contain the culprits. Adding a HEPA filter to the furnace or using a room air cleaner with such a filter also helps remove these troublemakers from the indoor air.
- If pet dander is a trigger, ask another family member to bathe your pet weekly. Be sure to wash your hands after petting your pet.
- Make your home a smoke-free zone.
- Avoid lingering outdoors before 10 a.m., when the outside air is thick with pollen.
- To wipe out mold and dust mites, keep the humidity in your house below 50 percent. Running the air conditioning or using a dehumidifier can help. ■

INSIDE

- 2 Ovarian Cancer: What Is Your Risk?
- 3 Depression Is a Disabling Disease
- 4 Lessen Your Stress and Other Tips for Healthy Living

Improve Your Memory with These Steps

Contrary to popular belief, memory loss isn't an inevitable part of aging. The following suggestions can help keep your mind sharp:

■ **Exercise your mind.** Researchers have found intellectually challenging activities—from playing bridge to musical instruments—can improve memory.

When you play chess, study a foreign language, or work a crossword puzzle, individual brain cells, called neurons, pick up their pace.

Not surprisingly, brain cells that aren't stimulated work less efficiently. In other words, when it comes to the brain, it's use it or lose it.

■ **Do things the hard way.** Balance your checkbook by doing the adding and subtracting yourself instead of using a calculator, or read instead of watching TV.

■ **Be physically active.** Exercise lengthens the life of brain cells and increases the number and complexity of connections between them.

■ **Stay connected.** Social contact can help keep the brain active. Having conversations, going places, and doing things with another person increase mental stimulation.

See your doctor if your long- or short-term memory is noticeably impaired.

Ovarian Cancer: What Is Your Risk?

The causes of most ovarian cancers are not known, but hormones may be partly to blame. Studies suggest that the fewer times a woman ovulates, the less likely she is to get this cancer.

OLDER WOMEN FACE AN INCREASED RISK

Only about 10 percent of ovarian cancer cases are linked to genetic factors. Women who have a close relative—mother, sister, or daughter—who had ovarian cancer are at greater risk. Likewise, one study showed that women with breast cancer and either the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene are at an increased risk.

A woman also may be at higher risk if she:

- Is older than age 50
- Has had breast or colon cancer
- Has a close female relative who had breast or colon cancer
- Has never given birth
- Has taken hormone replacement therapy after menopause

Some research suggests that a high-fat diet may increase risk.

EARLY DETECTION IS KEY

Ovarian cancer's symptoms often don't show up until the late stages of the disease. They include the following:

- Feeling bloated



- Nausea
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Urinating often
- Loss of appetite
- Unexplained weight gain or loss
- Abnormal vaginal bleeding

Based on a woman's risk factors, her doctor can recommend screening tests that may be appropriate, including when and how often. Pelvic exams, ultrasound exams, and other tests may help detect ovarian cancer.

Unfortunately, they do not guarantee early detection. More than 75 percent of women with ovarian cancer are diagnosed in advanced stages of the disease—when the long-term survival rate is lowest. ■

how to reach us

For questions about billing, benefits and claims, contact:

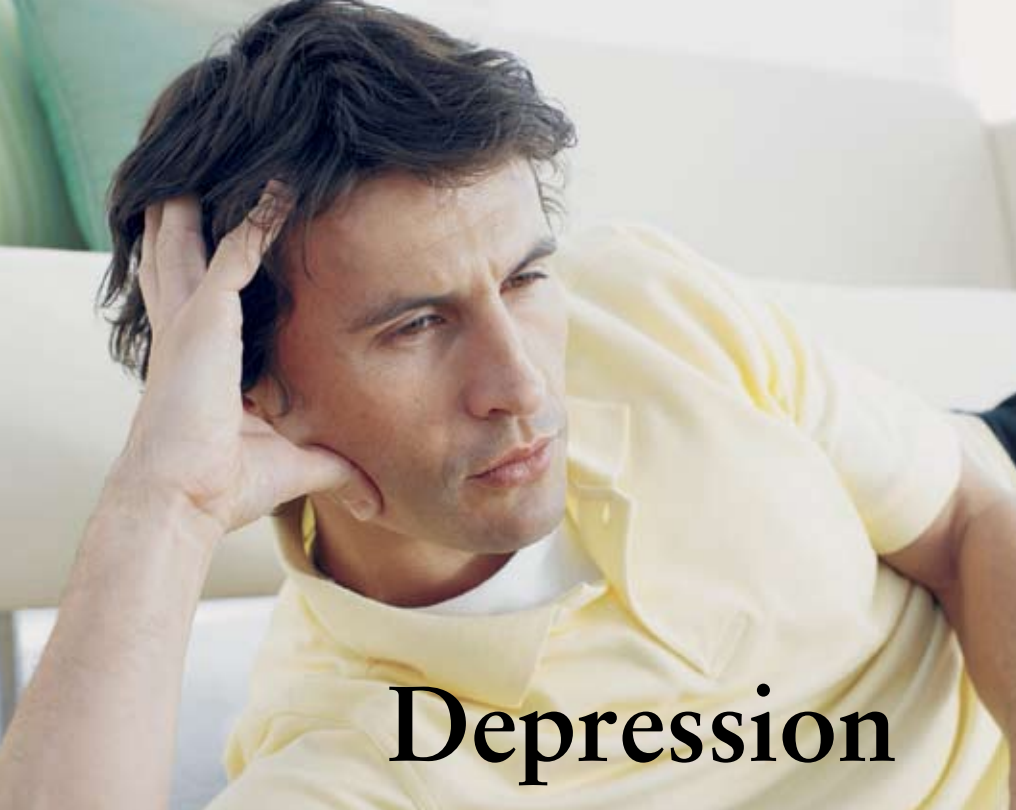
Customer Service
Monday–Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Central time)
402-398-3869 (Omaha)
1-800-424-7105 (toll-free)

Mail to: 7261 Mercy Road
P.O. Box 3248
Omaha, NE 68180-0001

For information about our products and services, call:
1-877-591-2583 (toll-free)



Visit us online: www.bcbsne.com



Depression

Is a Disabling Disease

Most people readily accept that chronic physical conditions have a negative effect on a person's overall health. Depression, on the other hand, typically is not thought to have the same effect.

Because it does not always cause physical symptoms, as asthma and diabetes do, many people do not recognize depression as a true illness. Perhaps this is one reason why it often goes undiagnosed and untreated.

THE EFFECTS OF DEPRESSION

A new study reported in the journal *The Lancet* says that depression does indeed affect physical well-being—and in a big way. In fact, it may be the most disabling disease in the world. And that's why, researchers say, diagnosing and treating depression can go a long way toward helping people live healthier, more productive lives. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, however, most people with depression do not get the help they need. And without treatment,

depression tends to become a chronic condition that may cause greater and greater disability over time.

The Lancet study was based on data from the World Health Organization's World Health Survey. More than 245,000 adults from 60 countries participated in the survey, in which they were asked several health-related, quality-of-life questions.

Researchers analyzed the data and found that 3.2 percent of the participants had depression. And then, looking at the answers to the health-related questions, noted that depression was more disabling than chronic physical conditions such as angina, arthritis, diabetes, and asthma.

GETTING HELP

Diagnosis is the first step toward treatment for depression. If you think you are depressed, talk with your doctor. She will conduct an evaluation and can recommend treatment, if necessary. ■

New Grant Program Looking for Nominees

Do you know of a wonderful project that could benefit the health and wellness of your community? We want to know about it too!

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska is launching a new grant program for communities across Nebraska outside of the Omaha/Lincoln metropolitan areas. In 2008, the Blue Health Advantage Wellness Grants will award up to 10 grants totaling \$50,000. The \$5,000 to \$10,000 grants will go to community programs and projects that focus on improving the health and wellness of Nebraska residents. The programs must be innovative, preventative, and produce measurable results. They also must encourage active participation by members of your community.



If you know of a program like this that could benefit from a financial boost, please encourage the director to apply. All of the grant information is on-line at www.bcbsne.com under "Community Relations." The deadline for applying is April 2, 2008, and the grants will be awarded this summer.



Postmaster: Please deliver
within March 24-28.

HEALTH BRIEFS

538M

How to Relax and Lessen Your Stress

Taking the following actions can help you manage your stress levels:

- Exercise. A regular workout can release pent-up frustrations. Aim for 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Don't isolate yourself. One of the best ways to fight stress is to discuss your problems with a friend or relative. Talking with others helps you realize you're not alone and can put a difficult situation in perspective.
- Pay attention to your diet and health habits. A sensible diet of wholesome, healthful foods can stabilize moods.
- Make time for laughter and fun. Surround yourself with positive people who like to laugh. Watch funny movies instead of the news. Engage in fun or silly activities.

Above all, take time for yourself, whether it's for a daily walk, a hot bath, or a quiet night at home.

Can You Erase Scars?

You can't eliminate scars entirely. But you may be able to minimize their appearance. There are many over-the-counter products available to help. How well they work is unclear, though. For example, silicone—in the form of a gel or rubber-like sheets—has been shown to reduce redness and flatten raised scars.

However, many studies contend that they don't work for everyone. If you try one, look for a lotion or gel that contains vitamin E or onion extract.

For more effective scar treatment, talk to your dermatologist about the following procedures:

- Dermabrasion or laser resurfacing
- Surgical options, such as skin grafting
- Steroid injections to shrink scars

For more health and wellness tips, visit Blue Health Advantage at www.bcbsne.com.

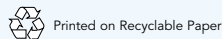
Wellness Connection

Bev Carlson,
Public Relations Specialist, Corporate
Communications

Brian Pickering, APR, Vice President, Corporate
Communications and Brand Management

Wellness Connection is provided by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska for our individual members. This information is intended to educate readers about subjects pertinent to their health, not as a substitute for consultation with a personal physician. Your contract may not cover all services referenced in this publication. Please see your contract for specific coverage information. © 2008 Printed in U.S.A.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.



Check Out Our New Look!

Our New Year's resolution was to give ourselves a makeover.

You can see the results for yourself at www.bcbsne.com.

While we are continuing to refresh and update our look, we hope you will find our updated site more user-friendly and easier to navigate.

